

In Search of Tł'iiish Naat'Agii (Snake-That-Flies)

Exploring the Prospect of an Unidentified Species

within Navajo and Hopi Lands

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[*Editor's Note:* This is a reprint of a paper written by Nick Sucik in 2003, while he was working on tribal lands in Arizona. It offers details on a rarely discussed mystery animal while also providing a window into the often hidden folklore and traditions to which Native Americans hold. Additional notes on 'flying snakes' in North America were published in the now out-of-print volume, *Cryptozoology and the Investigation of Lesser-Known Mystery Animals* (2006). A 2009 news report on Arizona 'flying snakes' can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iGEGAukTpk>. While certainly rare, sightings continue to be reported. One individual posted a video in 2018, claiming that he and his girlfriend saw a 'flying snake' in a Northern Arizona canyon: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=IZ3ZC4oT2No]

Edited by Russell Bates

Images by Aleksandar S. Trivich

Since early in the Spring of 2003 I have been conducting research into what appears to be a form of unclassified and unidentified reptile present within Navajo and Hopi lands in Arizona. In presenting a general report from my ongoing investigation I hope to:

- a) create awareness as to the presence of the potential species in question

- b) receive co-operative assistance and/or a formal endorsement toward current efforts to locate a live specimen, and
- c) understand the Tribe's position toward seeking out potentially unclassified animals within the Hopi Reservation.

INTRODUCTION

As of March 2003 I have been employed as a community coordinator in disputed tribal territories assigned to survey and to assist with the needs of Navajo families living within the Hopi Partitioned Lands. Being originally from Minnesota myself and having been stationed in Hawaii with the US Marine Corps, I found it extraordinarily easy to take great interest in the comparatively unique landscape and ecology of northern Arizona.

During the course of my stay in this region, word has come to me from both the HPL and the Navajo Partitioned Lands residents regarding rumors of strange, seemingly out-of-place animals allegedly sighted from time to time in certain areas. Considering that these vast stretches of terrain relatively are uninhabited, it would not seem impossible that there yet may exist fauna undocumented by modern science. Hence, I've made careful inquiry among the locals to see if there wasn't more to these rumors, that is, beyond mere loose gossip. I in turn have come to hear a long and rather colorful assortment of strange creatures allegedly seen or at least spoken about. This anecdotal bestiary includes within it snakes the size of telephone poles, scorpions the size of dogs, monitor lizards lengthy enough to span across a dirt road, nocturnal gorillas, stalking hyenas, skulking leopards, howling wild men, hostile mermaids, lurking water serpents, and elusive miniature horses that only are seen during early summer mornings.

Some of these alleged entities might be only the result of misidentifications, coupled with local excitement (if not hysteria) and generalized exaggeration.

Case in point: during June 2003, I heard rumors of a hyena being seen by locals in the Big Mountain area. The beast was accused of devouring newborn calves and colts alike, along with having taken down a few sheep as well and, most disturbingly, on one occasion being observed eating dog carcasses. A local man was said to have tracked and killed the beast, the carcass of which area residents then came to view. Some said it was in every way like a hyena, while others

said it was more like a big cat. I reasoned that, if there were any question left lingering over the identity of the animal, its bones should be recovered and brought in for examination. Such efforts were proven unnecessary for, when I spoke to the man in question, he promptly identified the animal as a dog. It was a very unusual dog both in appearance and behavior, but it still simply was a dog.

In spite of this sobering example, there are some stories of particular creatures that have such a consistent pattern that one wonders if there possibly is factual basis behind them. One such rumored animal stands out in particular from the above assortment, in that it widely is accepted as real. Adding credence to its possible existence is the uniformity of descriptions and testimonies regarding its morphology and its behavior.

SNAKE-THAT-FLIES

Among rural Navajos, both traditional and modern, there is enduring recognition of an as-yet unclassified and unrecognized species of reptile, known as *T'iiish Naat'Agii*, "Snake-That-Flies." Briefly, it is described as a snake (or at least as a snake-like reptile), possessing the actual ability to fly, as opposed to simply gliding, through aid of membranes or expanded skin extending behind the head and fanning out along the body, not unlike the exaggerated display of a cobra's hood.

Initially it may seem unlikely for such an animal to escape detection by science. But such reported reptiles are considered by the local people as a natural presence among the indigenous fauna. During my discussions with area residents, interestingly some of them were puzzled or became confused by an outsider's special attention to this particular animal. Knowledge of "Snake-That-Flies" by no means is limited only to the Navajo. I now understand that such creatures likewise are known to members of the Hopi Tribe, according to one source, as "Sun Snakes." While looking into this matter and also keeping my research colleagues informed of my pursuits, it was inescapable that comparisons would arise with descriptions and traditions that testify to flying serpents from elsewhere in North America.

At present, I've spoken with more than a dozen individuals who actually had sighted a specimen themselves, or at least who knew of a close family member, friend, or acquaintance who had experienced such a sighting. Aside from direct, second-, and third-hand

testimonies, I also sought out and familiarized myself with the local lore attributed to the animals, which time may or may not prove accurate to the nature of the creatures. When speaking with witnesses I've taken great pains not to 'lead' or 'suggest' details or descriptions or otherwise to risk compromising the accuracy of the testimony. And while knowledge or awareness of the serpents almost is common in certain areas, it would not appear to be a matter of common-knowledge so as to be openly discussed and widely understood. It's been difficult in a number of cases to get people to divulge what they know, partly due to the traditional Navajo perception of snakes generally being negative, if not perceiving them as outright evil. And while some regard the serpent as a mere snake despite its extraordinary characteristics, others sometimes regard them as supernatural entities and therefore not a topic acceptable for open conversation.

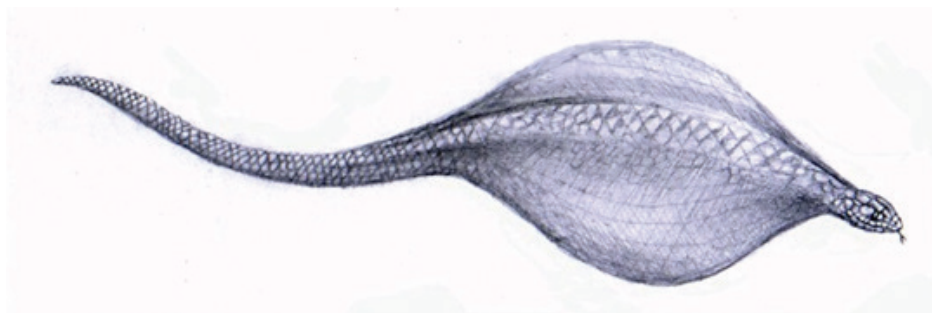
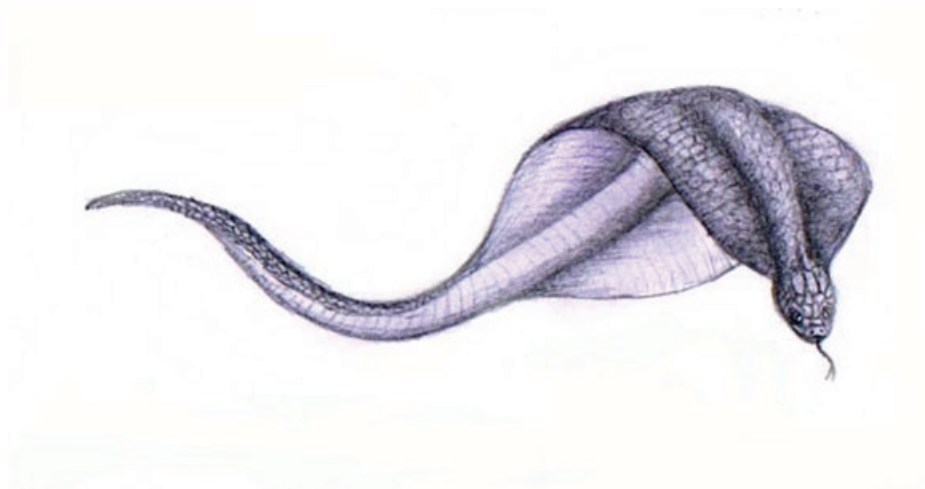
The sightings in this report are by no means the extent of the accounts I've collected, but I've selected those that comparatively offer more in describing particular characteristics.

MORPHOLOGY: GENERAL APPEARANCE

Despite the flying aspect, the general consensus among witnesses and others well familiar with the lore is that the reptiles are a form of snake, as opposed to being a 'snake-like animal.' In some accounts the witnesses cite the sole difference between a snake and the creature they had seen was simply the fact that it was steadily traveling off the ground. Only in cases where the animal was seen at close range was the presence of 'wings' noted. Sizes of the creatures tended to vary anywhere between 8 inches long to 12 feet in length, while the most common response was that they were 'snake-sized.'

COLORATION

Accounts vary where the animal's color and/or colors are concerned. This feature seemed quite secondary in reports by observers and, as most sightings take place from a distance, color seldom is discernible. However, one tribal elder told me the poisonous variant of 'Snake-That-Flies' could be identified by its "red belly."



Witness' composite sketches, though the wings almost always are described as transparent, whereas in these images they are colored.

(Images by Aleksandar S. Trivich)

APPENDAGES

The “wings” undoubtedly are the most peculiar feature, even if they technically may fall short of the definition. Those only having heard of the snakes tend to assume they sport bat-like wings, whereas witnesses mostly have described something far differing. Instead of possessing limbs, the animals sport a retractable membrane that emerges from behind the head and then trails back to either side along a significant portion of the body length. Some have likened it to the expansive display of a cobra’s hood, though both much larger and longer. This membrane is faint in color, almost to the point of transparency or, as one woman put it, “like they were made of plastic.” Thus, it may tend to go unnoticed, creating the surreal image of a snake magically ‘slithering’ through mid-air. In three separate accounts that I have collected, one first-hand and the other two by second-hand, the membranes, or “wings,” were noted as being “very beautiful” with a collage of “rainbow” colors. From these descriptions, such a spectacle sounds as if it only may be observable when light hits the membrane at certain angles.

BIOMECHANICS

That such an animal could persist so long beneath the radar of modern zoology perhaps is creditable to the simple fact that the concept of a *flying* snake likely is an oxymoron. In many cultures, including the Navajo, snakes are deemed dirty or vile due to their earthbound and slithering nature. Flight, in many ways, would be the very opposite of their lowly disposition. Symbolism aside, comprehending how a limbless animal actually could achieve true flight demands mental acrobatics. And that perhaps is the creature’s greatest defense against discovery. Their very existence would defy not only basic concepts of herpetology but also our present understanding of bio-physics.

FLYING

Officially, the only “flying snake” recognized today is a canopy dweller found in Southeast Asia. Its given title is unfitting, as the snake’s aerial feats are limited to a partially-controlled downward glide. Its flattened ribs serve to make the animal ribbon-shaped, thus to slow the descent. Not since the pterosaurs of the Mesozoic Era are reptiles thought to have achieved legitimate flight. The possibility of a true *flying* snake

here in northern Arizona has significant implications beyond being a “new” species. Its means of accomplishing flight entirely would be exceptional to all other (known) forms of flying animals. “Snake-That-Flies,” if confirmed and documented, would be the only animal known to achieve flight without conventional wings.

Most sightings involve the snakes traveling steadily through the air, though some accounts cite gains and changes in elevation, sometimes drastically so, confirming their time in the air is not limited merely to gliding. Most notable are four separate accounts that involve the animals achieving and then maintaining a circular course.

- Workers building a hogan were startled one evening when a “snake” flew inside the incomplete building and flew madly about in a circle, seemingly unable to find its way back out. The workers cautiously tried to kill the creature before it finally escaped.
- Two women related to me a memorable teenage experience they had sneaking out of the Tuba City high school dorms late one night. They made their way through a canyon and had arrived at a reservoir. A hissing noise suddenly was heard, seemingly overhead, which they compared to that made by a jet engine. Through the moonlight they saw a snake-like object diving down toward the reservoir over and again before lifting back up into the air. The object swooped down at the water until it apparently noticed the girls as they sought to hide behind a bush. Much to their horror, it then flew in circles above them, as if it was aware of their presence. Eventually it flew off and the two fled back to their dorm, feeling much chastened.
- A story from the 1930s describes how a Big Mountain area family held a bonfire after a day of tending their crops, only to have a “dragon” appear above them and fly in circles around the flames.
- In the 1980s, a teenage boy was reported as having shot a flying snake that swooped down at him whenever he neared its dwelling.

PROPULSION

The mechanics of propulsion remain the greatest mystery of an already mysterious creature, though all reports coincide in citing how the entire body is in motion during the animal's flight. The puzzling aspect of the described motion is that it frequently is described as being exactly that of a snake slithering on the ground. One could assume that these exact motions only are being compared in memory to the more standard spectacle, but I've encountered firm insistence that the contortions in every way were like those of a typical snake, only differing by occurring in mid-air. Such claims defy logic, however, as anything that becomes airborne and remains so must force air forward, downward, and aside for aerodynamic lift. The horizontal undulations of reptiles would be worthless in this manner. It is not impossible for a snake to undulate vertically to some degree but it is difficult to imagine one doing so long enough or vigorously enough to lift its own body weight.

As to the role of the membrane, I mostly have been under the impression it serves as a passive sail, directing and somehow forcing air downward to generate lift. One report, however, would suggest they hold a far more active function. In a story told to me since beginning this report, a woman reported a brief encounter experienced by her grandfather and uncle. The men were in the midst of building a shade when a flying snake landed atop a nearby branch. Perceiving it as a good omen, the grandfather reached out and seized the creature behind its head. While in the man's grasp, the serpent began to *flutter* its semi-transparent ("like plastic") oval wings at such a rapid beat they faded out of view (à la the wings of a hummingbird or bumblebee). The man then released the animal and instantly it shot up into the air and flew out of sight. The story also offered some insight as to the size of the snake. She explained that her grandfather was a tall man (over 5'11", at least) and while he held the snake at his chest level, its body still reached the ground.

CONTORTION

Two mentions have been made about flying snakes carrying sticks or twigs. One woman told that her mother saw a flying serpent on the ground that carried twigs by arching over them and pinching them between the bend of its neck and head. This certainly would be impossible in position and function, based upon everything known about

snake skeletons, and it just may be that she misunderstood what her mother had tried to describe. Oddly enough, I have heard another flying snake being seen with a small bundle of sticks that were constricted in its tail! As absurd as these stories sound, they would appear to acknowledge and support the belief that the serpents build nests in cliffs, which will be examined later in this report.

SOUND PRODUCTION: FLIGHT NOISE

Often cited is a type of ‘hissing’ sound, separate from a snake’s threatening hiss, which likely is made while the reptiles are in flight, in many cases even before being seen.

- In the 1930s or 1940s, a Big Mountain resident was out on a morning walk when he heard a growing hiss from off in the distance. His son, who related the story, likened his father’s description of the noise as very similar to a jet engine, like the drawn-out blowing of air. The man looked around until he spotted a snake’s outline in mid-air, sparkling in the sunlight as it seemingly slithered by overhead.
- The two women who recounted their nocturnal encounter near Tuba City described hearing first a hissing noise which they likened to that of a jet engine.
- In 1996 or ’97, a Hardrock area teenager out walking near his homesite heard a snake’s hiss and immediately froze in place. He stood unmoving and carefully looked about. The sound grew louder but he saw nothing on the ground. When he looked up, he saw a snake with thin extended transparent flaps “twisting” its way through midair before it finally landed in a tree.

VOLUNTARY NOISE

Further distancing the creature from standard snakes is the claim that “Snake-That-Flies” emits sounds other than the reported hissing, such as a kind of growl. The only specific example I can cite involved one woman’s account of what she saw and heard when she was a young girl. While that specimen flew through the air, she recounted that it made a “nice” hooting sound, like “looht, looht, looht,” each such hoot seeming to be in time to the reptile’s side-to-side contortions.

HABITAT

A) Nests: Aside from a capability for flight, the dwelling aspect of the reptiles almost is as remarkable. The creatures are reputed to construct cylindrical nests composed of small twigs and erected like towers against cliff walls. At present I have been guided only to one such structure, a collapsed nest in White Valley between Pinon and Hardrock. I have been informed that there is an intact nest near Big Mountain and another is said to be along the edge of a mesa near Hotevilla. I personally examined the White Valley nest and am enclosing photos taken at the scene. I've spoken to Big Mountain residents who claim to have seen the "dragon" nest in their area but so far have failed to inspire anyone to lead me there, as they traditionally and purposely avoid the site. The mesa nest near Hotevilla supposedly is known to (but not exclusively by) an elder residing in Tuba City. Apparently he shepherded a flock of sheep for a Hopi man in Hotevilla and often has watched the nest and its airborne inhabitants from a distance using binoculars.



Originally dubbed "Nest-That-Stands" and built entirely of small twigs, the structure, until relatively recently, stood up along this cliff wall in White Valley. Local tradition maintains the nest had been there possibly for 80 years or more. Shepherders deliberately avoided the site on account of the flying serpent that inhabited the nest. Sometime in the 1980s, rocks above the structure gave way, collapsing the nest into its present position. (The 11-inch shoe seen is for size comparison.)

Exactly how snakes could construct such structures baffles one even more than trying to comprehend their flight without wings. Still, that they “make” nests is repeated over and over again, even acknowledged in a Mexican reference that shall be included later in this. It may be that the serpents actually don’t build these nests themselves but, more probably, come to inhabit derelict nests of predatory birds, mainly hawks or eagles. Snakes are opportunistic animals and will inhabit the underground burrows of owls or prairie dogs. However, as stated earlier, I’ve heard two separate references where the snakes allegedly were seen “carrying sticks.”

As to the actual function of the nests and the number of occupants they hold, nothing I’ve gathered so far offers any clue. Based on local lore surrounding the White Valley nest, I have the impression that, until recently, it was a solitary snake that claimed residence. However, from a second-hand tale of the Hotevilla nest, it seemed as though a number of flying reptiles were observed emerging from the aerie.

B) Rocks: More common than nest references are accounts or stories describing *Tl’iish Naat’Agii* residing within rock crevices. The serpents so far only have been cited in areas of rocky terrain. Inquiries about relatively flat areas, such as Teesto, always were fruitless. Stone enclosures may serve as transient homes as certain area stories speak of the serpents suddenly appearing but remaining in that area only for a limited time.

In the Big Mountain area is a conspicuous rock formation known as “Sitting Rock” to the locals. Memory and tradition maintain that it once was the dwelling of a lone flying serpent. High in the rock was a wind-eroded hole or ‘window,’ and the animal had settled within. Below the rock was a well-frequented footpath; both travelers and shepherds long had learned to keep their distance as the snake was reputed for its hostility. Eventually, in the 1920s, locals became fed up with special detours on account of the snake and an effort to smoke it out was made by starting a fire in one of the lower holes. Whether the snake was present at the time is unclear but the attempt either to drive it out or kill it was deemed unsuccessful. It is unclear just when the serpent moved on. Still visible today are discolorations where a fire once was set in a hole below “Sitting Rock.”



Sitting-Rock located off the Hardrock bound road in Big Mountain. Sometime in the early 1900s a specimen stationed itself within the tunneled spaces of the stone. A mark of discoloration can be seen splashed around one opening where, according to tradition, locals set a fire to smoke out the creature.

AGGRESSION

Traditionally the dwellings of flying snakes, be they rock or nest, were avoided, not necessarily as respectful custom but moreso due to the snakes' aggressive behavior.

- In the early 1900s, it is said that a man on horseback passed near Sitting-Rock, apparently uninformed of its territorial occupant. The serpent flew from its hole toward the man and succeeded in biting him on the back of his head, peeling off his leather cap. The rider promptly fled the area, abandoning his cap.
- Twenty years or so ago, a Hardrock teenager shot and killed a flying snake. Whenever he happened to pass nearby, the serpent would emerge from its rock hole, become airborne, and

then swoop down threateningly at him. At last, he came to the area armed with a shotgun and killed the snake, supposedly in mid-flight. (The individual in question died a few years after the event.)

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND PERCEPTION

The Navajo generally hold snakes in negative temperament and this has been something of an obstacle in my inquiries on the matter. If snakes as a topic initially are not considered 'too' taboo, then most times it seems that unprecedented focus on the subject begets hesitation. Whereas traditional Navajos regard snakes as lowly, filthy creatures, I've heard two references of offerings being made toward flying serpents or at least being left at spots where they were seen or were thought to dwell. Likewise, in the story explained beneath 'Propulsion,' the sudden presence of a flying snake was perceived as a good omen. Exactly where this perception originates or even how widespread it is among traditional Navajos remains unclear.

Of course, some encounters with *Tl'iish Naat'Agii* are received differently. A mesa resident of Red Lake told of a neighbor who, many years ago, was caring for her sick daughter. As was the custom when a child was sick, the woman brought the girl to a particular side of their hogan to bask in the sunlight. While they were there, a winged snake flew down, landed on the ground nearby, and immediately coiled its body. The woman apparently attributed the event as a sign pertaining to her usage of peyote in the Native American Church and, as the story goes, she became a pious Christian in response.

While Navajo elders' response to flying snake encounters may deem the experience positive in some manner, it would appear that younger generations hold no such reverence, as recent accounts end with the creatures being killed after having been sighted. One individual I contacted has concluded that the reason "Snake-That-Flies" is rare today simply is due to the persistent habit of killing the creatures upon discovery. If this is true, urgent incentive exists to identify it and recognize it as an endangered species before it is too late.

ETHNOLOGY

If such animals have been present in the region for an extended length of time, as opposed to recent introduction or migration, then one

should expect a form of acknowledgement within tribal belief structure or lore beyond mere anecdote. While I am completely unfamiliar with Hopi acknowledgement at this point, I've been told that the Navajo rituals for the Wind, Rainbow and Lightning Ways all make reference to flying snakes or at least make representation in sand paintings. I've been unable to confirm this, though I am aware of their role in the Bead Chant story. As told, the snakes descend from a sort of celestial dwelling to rescue the main hero who was left stranded in the clouds when his befriended eagle companions fail to carry him any higher into the sky. The snakes succeed where eagles fall short, triumphantly delivering the hero into the sky world.

There is a curious though painfully short reference to flying snakes in Gladys A. Reichard's "*Navaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*" (Princeton Bolligen Publishing, 1950), which states on page 467:

One of Matthews' informants states that when the animals were people, the birds and snakes built cliff dwellings, and he asks the rhetorical question, "If they had not wings, how could they have reached their houses?" He explained why the snakes were able to help the Eagles and Hawks lift the boy to the sky in the Bead Chant story.

OUTSIDE REFERENCES

Flying snake references are by no means exclusive to Navajo and Hopi lands or to the southwestern United States for that matter. Through the assistance of colleagues, I have been apprised of a small number of written accounts pertaining to the presence of, or the presence of a belief in, snakes capable of flight in other areas of the continent. Adding substantial credence to the matter is how particular attributes discussed in this report find echoes in these outside references.

LEON, MEXICO

The first to be reviewed is titled *The Serpent* by Juana Pequeno and told by Nicole Ruiz, which was found by a research colleague at: www.sanbenito.k12.tx.us/Schools/BertaCabaza/READING%20DEPT/Carmona/Snake/The_Serpent.html

My grandmother grew up in the mountains of Mexico, near a town called Leon. There was talk about a creature named "*a serpe*" or serpent. It was supposed to be a rattlesnake that had gotten very old. It had wings like a bat, feet like an eagle with long talons, and thick black hairs between some of the scales. Its head was just like a rattlesnakes with huge fangs. It built a nest like a birds, between large rocks. Supposedly, it was dangerous because it could bite like a rattlesnake, and it was easier to get you because it could fly. When it flew, it would make a strange humming sound. Whenever one was heard or seen, the villagers would chase it until they killed it. When my grandmother was eight years old, she was chased by a bull. To get away from it she climbed up on a big pile of rocks. When she reached the top, she saw a bird's nest and there in the middle was a serpent. As it started to uncoil, she jumped off the pile and ran to go tell her father what she had seen. Everybody from the ranch came back and killed it.

Incidentally, while I was in the Marines, a Mexican friend once told me how in the province where he grew up, it was widely accepted that when snakes reached an advanced age, they would develop "feathers." He felt the evolutionary concept that scaly dinosaurs became feathered birds vindicated the lore. With Quetzalcoatl in mind, I then asked him if there was any mention that the feathered snakes flew. Regrettably, three years later, I cannot recall his exact response.

Whereas the nest-building affiliation and the reference to a "humming sound" certainly ring with familiarity; the bat-like wings, eagle feet and "thick black hairs" appear as problematical features. As it happens, I have heard two separate accounts purported to be sightings of flying snakes yet significantly contrasted from standard descriptions. In both instances the reptile was described as having a horse-shaped head, with bat-like wings and feet. Both accounts cited the presence of hair on the creature's otherwise scaly body. Presented with these three references to flying snakes sporting bat-wings and limbs, I cannot but wonder whether an entirely separate type of flying animal unknowingly has been intertwined within the matter. However, this confusion

needn't distract from simultaneous traits acknowledged in Mexican lore and in that of the Navajo.

OKLAHOMA

In personal correspondence, Kiowa professional writer Russell Bates has told me that, during the Depression Era as cars were abandoned for the more feasible and affordable horse, thus allowing travelers a greater exposure to surrounding wildlife, stories began to emerge of flying snakes being seen in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma.

FLORIDA

Richard Muirhead, an English researcher with a particular interest in reports of unusual reptiles, came upon an interesting passage in a book called "Myths of Ancient Science" by Edmund Goldsmid published in 1886: 'Hieronymu Benzo, in his account of the New World and of the French expedition to Florida, in chapter 4 on page 480 it states:

"I saw a certain kind of Serpent which was furnished with wings, and which was killed near a wood by some of our men. Its wings were so shaped that by moving them it could raise itself from the ground and fly along, but only at a very short distance from the earth."

SOUTH CAROLINA

This final example comes from no less than the *New York Times*, dated Wednesday, May 30, 1888, page 3:

Columbia, S.C., May 29.—Closely following the appearance of the hand of flame in the heavens above Ohio comes a story from Darlington County, in this State, of a flying serpent. Last Sunday evening, just before sunset, Miss Ida Davis and her two younger sisters were strolling through the woods, when they were suddenly startled by the appearance of a huge serpent moving through the air above them. The serpent was distant only two or three rods when they first beheld it, and was sailing through the air with a speed equal to that of a hawk or buzzard, but without any visible means of propulsion.

Its movements in its flight resembled those of a snake, and it looked a formidable object as it wound its way along, being apparently about 15 feet in length. The girls stood amazed and followed it with their eyes until it was lost to view in the distance. The flying serpent was also seen by a number of people in other parts of the county early in the afternoon of the same day, and by those it is represented as emitting a hissing noise which could be distinctly heard. The negroes in that section are greatly excited over the matter. Religious revival meetings have been inaugurated in all their churches, and many of them declare that the day of judgment is near at hand.

At this stage, it perhaps has become unnecessary to highlight the patterns of continuity that bind these unrelated references.

CONCLUSION

Pursuing evidence of “Snake-That-Flies” may have become a race against time. The majority to whom I’ve spoken on the matter believe the animals are on the decline, if not already extinct in some areas. What contributes to their demise, beyond human agency, is unclear. What is clear is that, without ‘discovery,’ without proper recognition, and without subsequent monitoring, the species very well may be lost even before it is ‘found.’ (All that having been said, now it just has been made known to me that there apparently was a sighting just last year near Shungopavi.)

Seeking out the creatures need not entail lengthy search and survey efforts into areas of previous sightings. If an open atmosphere were created that conveyed official interest in the animals, say, via the media, it might inspire those familiar with active dwelling sites to step forward and submit their knowledge of potential locations. Winter actually may prove the better time to seek this information, as traditionalists tend to discuss reptile matters more openly under reassurance that the creatures sleep, cannot hear their names, and therefore are unlikely to appear or to cause harm.

In addition to the significant implications “Snake-That-Flies” would hold for science, its ‘discovery’ would hold much benefit for the tribes, perhaps even as a tourist magnet. In turn, it might draw in a

considerable amount of welcomed revenue, especially in the light of news that the Mojave station will be closing in two years.

Finally, the greatest implication such a discovery may merit is that, acknowledgement of such an animal would vindicate the rationality of traditional tribal knowledge and culture. Historically the tendency has been to dismiss native conceptual understandings of matters pertaining to nature, only to have many of them validated years later. The symbiotic relations of humans and animals, the medicinal values of particular flora, and even the intertwining complexities of ecosystems in the New World are just a few examples. As well, ‘discovering’ and proving such a creature, which long has been known to tribes of the Southwest, would serve to remind that Indo-European science has observed these continents only for five hundred years. And that there remains a lot of ‘catching-up’ to do with those native peoples whose devoted study of this land outstrips the scientific observations by twelve thousand years and more.

[Editor’s Note Part Deux: There is no doubt that the idea of a flying reptile of this sort will engender immediate disbelief in many people. For a cryptozoological investigator, it isn’t a matter of belief in or against a particular ethnozoological entity, it’s a belief that the matter should be investigated. Ethnozoology by its very definition is uncertain and subjective; “snake” may not actually mean an ophidian, regardless of what the eyewitness believes. The creature, if it exists, may be some sort of invertebrate, for example, that resembles a snake. Eyewitnesses may be unreliable in their ability to adequately distinguish and classify physical characters and behavior. All reports must read with a critical eye.]